DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 955 SP 036 659

AUTHOR Clarken, Rodney H.
TITLE Toward Bias-Free Teaching: Gender Equity in the Classroom.
PUB DATE Sep 95
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the United Nations Non-Governmental Forum on Women (Beijing, China, August 31-September 8, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Females; Higher Education; Leadership Responsibility; *Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; *Teacher Expectations of Students; *Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching (Occupation)
IDENTIFIERS *Gender Issues

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses inequities and injustices toward women and advocates remedies through education. Practical suggestions based upon expectations theory and the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement Test (TESA) program offer teachers ways to reduce discrimination and improve achievement in classrooms, especially for those denied an equal opportunity to learn. Teachers directly influence the development of their students. If they know how to teach equitably, care about justice in their classrooms, and teach in the right way, they can affect marvelous change in their students and classrooms. The same opportunities, rights, and curriculum for both men and women of all ages are needed to establish equity in the classroom, but women should be given preference in education as the first educators of the next generation and to redress the imbalance that exists. Teacher expectations of a student affect how they interact, which in turn affects the student's achievement. Expectations are expressed in actions and actions in turn reflect expectations. Fifteen teacher behaviors that affect students and the classroom environment are briefly addressed: equitable distribution of response opportunities, individual helping, latency, delving, high level questioning, affirming/correcting, praising, reasons for praise, listening, accepting feelings, proximity, courtesy, positive personal interest, touching, and desisting. (NAV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 955

Toward Bias-Free Teaching: Gender Equity in the Classroom

Rodney H. Clarken
Northern Michigan University

Paper presented at the
United Nations Non-Governmental Forum on Women
Beijing, Aug. 31- Sep. 8, 1995.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Clarken

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

SB36659

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This paper discuses the inequities and injustices toward women and advocates remedies through education. Practical suggestions based upon expectations theory and the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) program give teachers ways they can reduce discrimination and improve achievement in classrooms, especially for those denied an equal opportunity to learn. The following fifteen teacher behaviors are briefly addressed: equitable distribution of response opportunities, individual helping, latency, delving, high level questioning, affirming/correcting, praising, reasons for praise, listening, accepting feelings, proximity, courtesy, positive personal interest, touching, and desisting.

An important question facing our world today is concerning the rights of women. Throughout all recorded history, women have been considered inferior to men in all ways: physically, mentally, emotionally and psychologically. This inferiority has been supported by the philosophies, traditions, religions and sciences of the past. The very term "history" represents a bias against women.

In many societies, women have been regarded as subhuman, on the same level as the livestock or possessions that belonged to the man. Even the term for women in several languages was the same as for possessions or animals. Not only have they been considered as inferior, it has been commonly accepted that women were somehow harmed by education. Women have been suppressed with these conceptions throughout "history." They have not been allowed adequate education, given opportunities for development, or accorded human dignity and human rights. The vestiges of these injustices against half of humanity are apparent today. This paper explores ways teachers can help eliminate the biases and injustices that are so prevalent throughout the educational institutions of the world, with particular attention to gender discrimination in teacher-student interactions in the classroom.

The last 150 years have seen a movement in religion, science and human affairs to remedy this longstanding prejudice against women. It is now generally recognized that although women differ in some aspects from men, these differences in no way imply inferiority. It is obvious and accepted that the physical differences between women and men form a necessary complement to each other, as in procreation.

In other realms as well, women and men are a complement like the hands of a body or the wings of a bird. Although a right hand cannot replace a left hand, and a left wing is different from a right wing, they perform complementary functions. If one is less developed than the other, the organism suffers. Male and female form the hands and wings of the social body of humanity.

One hand has dominated over the other with its more forceful and aggressive qualities, but these qualities are losing their past dominance. The mental, intuitive, and spiritual qualities of women are becoming more important and valued. This change is resulting in a fairer and more healthy balance between women and men, but much more needs to been done before gender equity is a reality, not merely an ideal. We are just entering the stage of realizing its necessity and having the will to do something about it. As we progress, the principles and ideals of equal rights for all people will become more accepted and steps taken to apply them in our daily lives.

Solution

This paper focuses on the actions teachers can take to make their classrooms more equitable, especially for women. It gives practical suggestions based upon research in expectation theory for teaching in ways that reduce discrimination in classrooms. Much documentation of the inequities and injustices in education toward women exists to establish the need for change. A wealth of resources can be referred to for more information on these topics, such as those published by authors like

Gilligan, Sadker and Sadker and organizations like the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Although this paper focuses on gender equity, these same principles can be applied to remedy other forms of discrimination that occur in classrooms throughout the world.

The process of changing behavior involves knowledge, volition and action. Teachers play a vitally important role in this process as they directly influence the development of their students. If they know how to teach equitably, care about justice in their classrooms, and teach in the right way, they can affect marvelous change in their students and classrooms. On the other hand, if they are not equitable, they can also cause great harm. Teachers have a great role and responsibility in society. To teach well requires much knowledge and effort. Schools and classrooms need to be well organized around sound principles, and the teachers need high standards of conduct and excellence.

The same opportunities, rights and curriculum for both men and women of all ages are needed to establish equity in the classroom. Women should even be given preference to men in receiving education as they are the first educators of the next generation and therefore can have the greatest potential for improving their children's education and society's conditions. Another reason for affording women greater preference in education is to address the imbalance of women's role and influence in the world, which is sorely needed at this stage in civilization.

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

Teachers' expectations about a student affect how they interact with that student, which in turn affects the student's achievement. Expectations are expressed in actions and actions in turn reflect expectations. Expectations about and actions toward others influence their growth and development. Expectation theory has been much researched by psychologists and is well established. That beliefs about others influence their behaviors is sometimes referred to as the "Pygmalion Effect," after the literary example of the same principle. If people are treated in a certain way, they will change their behavior to meet others' expectations. This principle has also been expressed by many philosophers throughout the ages.

Teachers' perceptions of female students affect the quality and quantity of their interactions with them, which affects the female students' learning opportunities. Teachers often unconsciously and unknowingly carry the belief passed down throughout history that women are inferior. The Teacher Expectation and Student Achievement (TESA) program is an effective way to help teachers interact equitably with all students, which in turn results in increased achievement, especially for those who were previously deprived of these quality interactions. The initial research on TESA was conducted in the Los Angles schools (see articles by S. Kerman). Most of the follow-up research has been conducted in the United States, where this program has gained much attention over the last two decades, although the findings appear to be relevant to educators throughout the world.

The research on which TESA is based identified the differences in teachers' behaviors toward perceived high achieving students and perceived low achieving students and recommended relating to all students as high-achieving students.Teachers identified those students in their classes for

whom they had high expectations: Which students will do the best and accomplish the most? Which students are not very capable and will not achieve much? Bias in teaching a certain gender, race, class, religion, or ethnic group unfairly was found. Then someone observed their teaching and analyzed how they treated these two groups differently; how their expectations toward each group affected their behaviors toward them. Teachers can conduct similar research in their own classrooms and schools.

TESA offers practical ideas about how teachers might systematically and measurably treat all students as high achievers. Teachers can monitor or have others monitor how they are doing with each area. This monitoring can involve a simple tallying of the number of times a teacher does a certain thing and with whom. If some inequity is noted, then a remedial plan can be put into effect. Later the teacher's performance can be again assessed to measure growth.

TESA consists of three strands with five units in each strand. As ways of demonstrating expectations differ from culture to culture and within cultures, teachers will need to use common sense and wisdom when applying these principles in their classrooms. What might be considered positive in one setting could be negative in another. The degree and way that each item should be exercised in actual classroom practice will depend upon an observant and sensitive teacher. The goal is to provide each child a loving and positive environment in which to learn. All students should be praised and encouraged to develop to their full potentials through means based upon reason.

Response opportunities. The first strand, response opportunities, suggests how teachers can allow students equitable opportunities to respond and be successful in instructional activities. Response opportunities focus on oral interaction, but can be applied to other learning situations. These interactions do not have to be just between teacher and student, but also can occur in student to student interactions. Students can be trained how to apply these ideas in small group work, discussions and peer tutoring and other learning activities. By increasing the number of response opportunities, teachers can improve learning. The five areas to promote response opportunity are equitable distribution of response opportunities, individual helping, latency, delving, and high level questioning.

Equitable Distribution of Response Opportunities Equitable distribution of response opportunities is the most basic and most obvious of the ways in which we can equalize opportunity in the classroom. By equitably asking and allowing all students to answer questions and participate in class activities, teachers communicate the expectation that all can learn and will be expected to respond to questions. Consciously and unconsciously many teachers call on certain students and ignore others.

Teachers can equalize response opportunities by devising systems that involve all students in answering questions and discussions. Simple ways of doing this include random systems of calling on students such as picking names out of a hat or following different patterns based on students' names or seating arrangement. In these ways response opportunities are uniformly distributed throughout the class. Teachers often ask for volunteers and call on the students who volunteer. This system favors high achieving and more aggressive students. Boys are generally called on more

that girls and participate more in discussions. Analysis of classroom interactions show that boys generally are more aggressive and more often dominate class discussions.

Individual Helping Teachers individually help students they have higher expectation of more than those for whom they hold lower expectations. By equalizing the amount of individual help teachers give students, they can improve performance. Teachers can check how much they help different individuals to determine if any inequities exist that they feel should be adjusted. They can devise systems that allow an equalized amount of access for individual students to interact with the teacher. Teachers can also try to give every student some individual attention regularly through systematic contact.

Latency Most teachers allow a very short time for students to respond to questions. Observations of American teachers have found that the time allowed from the time a question is asked to when the student responds is a fraction of a second (see research of M. Rowe). It has also been observed that teachers will wait longer for those students whom they think can answer the question. This difference in behavior toward the perceived better students communicates expectations to the entire class. It is recommended that all students be allowed at least five seconds to answer before the teacher either tries to assist or asks another student. Teachers can monitor or have others monitor their wait time between question and answer. A simple way teachers can to do this is to count to five slowly in their heads before the help or go on. Most teachers are surprised how little time they allow and that they allow more time for perceived high achievers than for perceived low achievers. Allowing more time to answer permits more thoughtful answers and gives opportunities to those who are not as quick to respond. There is some evidence that this approach is more suitable to women's response patterns.

Delving If a teacher believes a student can answer a question, she will provide additional information to assist the student. If she perceives the student cannot answer the question, she will not bother probing further by giving clues or other kinds of assistance. Delving verbally and nonverbally to help a student respond happens more with high achieving students. Does the teacher give the same amount of help to all students? Who does the teacher help more? The answers to these questions may expose some bias. By trying to help all students equally, teachers equalize their opportunities to appropriately respond.

Higher Order Questioning According to Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain, there are six levels of knowledge: recall, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Teachers ask students perceived to be less able lower order questions, mostly simple recall, and ask students perceived as very able higher order questions. Teachers can communicate higher expectations and encourage higher performance by asking students to respond to questions beyond the rote memory level. Higher level questioning is related to higher level thinking. Students who can think and function effectively on the higher levels will have more potential for success in today's world. Expect all students to function on the higher cognitive levels and they will try to arise to the expectation. Communicate higher expectations by asking all students higher order questions.

Some teachers do not call on low achieving students so as not to embarrass them in front of their classmates or waste class time waiting for them to answer. Many students have learned to be mentally absent from the class by conditioning the teacher not to call on them. They do not volunteer to answer questions, do not answer questions when called upon and in other ways communicate to the teacher that they will not cooperate. Teachers should not allow such in-class drop outs. Teachers can convey high expectations and encourage higher achievement by increasing active learning. Let students know that they are all expected to participate and do well in school. Encourage their involvement by calling on them, individually helping them, giving them enough wait time, delving to help them respond, and asking them higher order questions.

Feedback. Feedback is essential to learning. Using feedback effectively is a basic educational principle. The quality and quantity of feedback students receive affects their achievement. The feedback strand of TESA has five aspects: affirm or correct a student's performance, praise of learning performance, reasons for praise, listening, and accepting feelings.

Affirm or Correct a Student's Performance The most basic level of feedback is to affirm or correct a student's performance. Teachers affirm or correct weak students less than perceived higher ability students. Teachers sometimes fail to affirm or even acknowledge an answer and go on without saying whether the student's response was acceptable or not. If a student answers incorrectly, some teachers do not correct the student response. Sometimes they do not want to embarrass the students by correcting them, but they are also communicating that they do not think the students can learn and are not giving them a good opportunity to do so. Using individual helping, latency, delving and other techniques, such as telling them the question for which their answer would be correct, exhibits faith in the students and encourages them to try harder.

Praise of Learning Performance Praise of learning performance or positively reinforcing a student's performance is the second unit of feedback. The positive influence of praise and reinforcement is one of the most documented findings in psychology and is the foundation of behaviorism and conditioning. People and animals are conditioned to do what they are reinforced to do. Praise and encouragement have been cited by many successful people as important influences in their lives. Teachers' praise must be spread to all students, not just the most favored. Find something good to praise in each student, and do not miss opportunities to encourage high achievement. According to the principles of behaviorism, praise or other positive reinforcers, to be most effective, should be properly scheduled, with progressively longer variable intervals being generally suggested.

Reasons for Praise Giving reasons or explanations why a student's performance is praiseworthy is done more with students for whom teachers have higher expectations. Not only should teachers praise students' efforts, they should tell them why such efforts were praiseworthy. This helps students understand what the teacher liked about their work and why their performance was good. By doing this for all students, teachers communicate higher expectations and call the students to higher performance.

Listening Teachers listen more closely to students for whom they have higher expectations. Listening and reacting to what all students say in a way that demonstrates interest, respect and concern will increase the

quality and quantity of interactions. Giving students who are underachieving your undivided attention as much as possible when they speak to you, making eye contact, if appropriate, and responding in ways that show you have truly listened to them, are all ways to better listen.

Accepting Feelings Accepting students' feelings in a nonevaluative manner so that they feel valued is behavior teachers demonstrate toward students they respect. Teachers are generally more accepting of the feelings of higher achieving students. This behavior conveys higher expectations, honors the student's feelings and allows the student more opportunities to grow. Through appropriate feedback to all students, teachers can help them develop intellectually, psychologically and socially. When teachers censure, discount, oppress or belittle students' feelings, rather than patiently help the student to develop, they communicate a disregard for the students and hamper their development.

Personal Regard. The five units in the personal regard strand of TESA are proximity, courtesy, personal interest and compliments, touching, and desisting. Personal regard for others can be communicated in many ways. There are subtleties to showing respect and caring that differ from culture to culture. A self concept is influenced by others' views and the support given to develop it. Self concept develops gradually, like the physical body. Love and kindness greatly affect developing character and achievement.

Proximity Proximity means being physically close to a student. Effective and appropriate physical nearness to students is defined differently in different cultures, but teachers are predisposed to be nearer for a longer time to students they like than to students for whom they have less regard. Seating patterns may also reflect this bias. Teachers can monitor their physical closeness to students to see if this area needs to be addressed.

Courtesy By showing courtesy, teachers act and speak with respect and kindness toward their students. Courtesy is a central issue in personal regard, greatly affects others and is important in creating civil classrooms. Teachers generally are more courteous to students they regard more highly. Teachers should be polite, respectful, and mannerly to all students.

Personal Interest and Compliments Teachers show more personal interest in perceived high achievers by asking more questions about them and complimenting them more. By showing interest in students and making positive statements about them, teachers demonstrate greater personal regard. This behavior encourages the students to feel more positive about themselves. By feeling valued by others, students feel more valuable and try to behave appropriately.

Touching Showing friendliness and respect through touching also occurs more with students whom teachers perceive as high achievers. In some cultures and in some settings touching is not appropriate, but in as much as touching conveys respect and caring, it can communicate higher personal regard and expectations toward a student. Psychological experiments in touching have shown that touching positively affects people.

Desisting Desisting is how teachers stop behavior that is not acceptable. Teachers correct high achieving students differently from those students who are less highly regarded. Students sense this difference and often respond accordingly. If undesirable behavior is manifested by the students, that behavior should be stopped and prevented in the future.

Some form of punishment is necessary, although behavioral scientists have shown that reinforcement of positive behaviors is a more powerful shaper of behavior. Desisting negative student behavior through punishment should convey a positive personal regard for the student, but not the behavior. If children are physically hit or verbally abused, their development will be negatively affected. Teachers can help all students develop healthy characters by avoiding abusive treatment and stopping negative behavior through methods based on reinforcement theory: introduce positive stimuli or remove negative stimuli to encourage desirable behaviors and remove positive stimuli or introduce negative stimuli to discourage undesirable behavior. Teachers can help students have higher expectations for themselves by asking students in a calm, courteous and respectful way to stop misbehavior that implies the negative behavior was not expected from them.

People generally show greater personal regard to those they feel are more capable. Students who receive more care and respect are encouraged to achieve more. Teachers can help all students reach higher levels of achievement by developing the above characteristics of personal regard.

Conclusion

The condition of women throughout recorded history has been deplorable. Women were kept subjugated through lack of education and opportunity. Women who tried to improve their condition were subjected to abuse. It was considered a handicap if a woman was educated. Given equal education and opportunity, women will equal men in capacity and contributions.

Not only will the education of women remedy a great inequity and injustice in human rights, but it will also have a tremendous influence on improving the general welfare of all people. The recipients of their improved education will be all of the society. Most importantly they will positively influence the early lives of their own children. This influence alone will bring incalculable benefits that will be felt for generations to come. Because of their feminine qualities, they will surpass men in many fields of endeavor when they are accorded equal rights.

Teachers can move toward bias-free teaching and gender equity in the classroom. Teachers have a practical and measurable way to assess their treatment of students and to monitor their progress toward equitable educational opportunities for their students through the teacher behaviors identified in TESA. Wisdom and effort will be required to apply these principles, but the benefits in terms of the increased development of the wealth of human potential neglected because half of the world has been denied equal education and opportunity is unimaginable. The light of equity and justice shining from the classrooms can illumine the whole earth.